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The Crocus

Yesterday
I awoke at noon
and encountered a crocus.

Plum-lined and
lavender-filled petals
harbored the yellow,
wooly center
where unrelenting
sun rays
daringly dipped
for a taste.

Two firm,
green leaves
resembling simple
blades of grass
reached up to the
petals and parted outwards,
as if to allow room for growth.

This was my unexpected pleasure.

Today
I awoke at seven
and stumbled upon the same crocus,
except it was sleeping.

Solitary and
substantially smaller,
the petals stood
straight up,
sword-like,
awaiting the sun's
inspiration.

The leaves,
standing erect
as children lined up
at the ice cream man's truck,
were selfishly stiff,
until I saw one little beam
of sunlight
caress and rouse a jade leaf.

I was tempted to seize it,
but I didn't.

Jaime Long

Contracted Love

My father sold Ford cars for income, improving
his title as the years passed. A pin-striped suit he
wore reminded me of the jail cell
his work had created. The sentence was six days a
week, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. shifts, limiting our time to the moon's
kingdom. Most nights I slept, often pretending, when
he came home to sell me his love. McDonald treasures
seemed to be his best sales pitch. That night I awoke
to his footsteps drawing heavier and heavier,
like cement blocks were his shoes.
The Stetson cologne soured the air.
"Melissa . . . Melissa, I bought you something."
I opened my eyes.
Pathetic doll.
The yellow string fell from her head,
lifeless in curl. A pink frilled dress
with charcoal patent-leather shoes,
scarlet smile painted on the face. Her body dangled in the
air, hungry for my embrace. Coarse whiskers stabbed my face
as he kissed me. "Good night"
ended our meeting and closed that deal.

Melissa Ainsworth

Future Explosions

Skeletons' bones prick the eggshells on the bathroom floor.
The flush of my face as the lights turn on and,
In the climax of the night, the branches scratch at the window.

Locked in my deathbed, the devil's fork penetrating the security of mortality,
Skipping to the cellar to hide in the stove, I feel cigarettes puncturing my womb.

Asleep . . . ?

On the next visit, the women talk to me and I cower,
Dive into the toilet bowl, drowned by compassion.

Trampled among football cleats and
Kicked by winged-tipped leather rattlesnakes,
Their ridicule is venom that pervades my blood and turns my heart against me.

Overconfident in my insignificance, I can no longer speak.
Conscious dreams of heroism are rendered stagnant
By the needle pricks from loaded pencils.

Covering again my clothed hands is the chill
That nothing that was written on the beach of her body will be there the next day.
Crashing waves of isolation swallowed my confidence, knowledge, creativity.

Eric Thanner

Hair

half-lidded and half-ugly
then he stared
and leaned boneless,

pale against the frame
watching the strands
falling

electric

cutting through the stale silence

how they caught the sun and
shone like a string of Japanese
Lanterns.

stark banded and sapping
of cherry smoke.

Amy May

Traffic Cop

Hanging on a wire high above the street.
No senses, no feeling, no judgment.
Inanimate.
But still in control.
Control over thousands of cars,
thousands of people.

We all know the rules,
green means go,
red means stop,
and yellow means slow down.
But does it?
Do we?

A camera sits high atop a pole
watching the light cycle
waiting for that one person to trip the sensor
so it can react.
Flash!
A picture taken.
A ticket sent.
It knows the car,
it knows the owner,
but does it know the driver?

Kelly Outten

Silly Little Super Model

Picked her up on the boardwalk,
Brown-hair touched with sun, skin glazed a golden tan.
She had one of those smiles that whisks away a man's courage,
And a chiseled body of curves that hangs him over the line.

I'm not sure what she called herself, perhaps something Swedish,
But she put the swimsuit models to shame.
She liked it when we just cuddled.
I liked it when she purred my name.

I ask about her agent as she talks of Beethoven and headline news,
Wondering if she sees what's in my eyes.
As she comments about the moon's splash on the water,
I pull off my shirt and roll out the blanket.

Lying against my chest, she asks what I like most about her.
I get that puppy-dog look.
I tell her that she is beautiful, but when she nudges for more,
I bite my lip as nothing comes to mind.

Dan Sadler

Kristen Woodburn

'Twas a Vision I once had...

He stood towering, massive over the peneplain. A gigantic beast lapping his fill of the insignificant lakes, his tongue barely fitting within the average ox-bow. All manner of fish and mammal find their world enveloped by his enormous gullet.

His gray, meaty flesh rippling with steel-spring sinews. His neck like a nation swings with sleek godly movement. The warlong, sumoline force, with such mammoth strength that a cough could rip a man's trunk from his legs and flesh from his bones, is fully aware of the multitude of facets within range of his teaming senses. Immense is but a fraction of his government. His ghastly eye combs, almost rapes the horizon with the intimacy of its scan. The sun forces, strains itself to bathe the beast and hardly prays to warm whatever fabled existence lies behind it. Upon the massive, faintly hispid plateau that is the thing's head, stands a ravishing, stunning beauty.

Incomplete...

Joel Griffith

Three Ships

Why are you glancing beyond me, looking away,
Still in my direction. Pointing your beacon towards my
Harbor, never to anchor your love?
Only to pass by.
Signal to the attractive shores.
The strong ports of wealth.
Bartering your innocence, gambling your compassion,
To the jokers, wild cards, and tumbling stones.

Eric Thannner

Gigi

I can remember the smell of beer
and worms while fishing at his
secret fishing hole, now passed down
to me. Or the times when his
half-toothed smile made me laugh,
as he'd tell stories of his life
while he drank his Canadian whiskey
and a warm Gennesse for a chaser.
Also the lingering stench of cheap Phillies
Cigars in my clothes when I came
home from a visit, and every time I think,
Will this be the last time that stench
will linger on my clothes?

My Gigi lies there with plastic tubes
in him, restrained and
sedated for his pain, and there is nothing.
No sweet smell of alcohol,
No stench of cheap cigars, and
No half-toothless smile,
Just his hand on mine.

Mike Worozbyt

Bold Fearless

Bold fearless brave

I am an ephemeral body
immersed in strong tea—

this intrepid mania seeps into me
sizzling like the stars of my spirit
come on hallucinations
come on three a.m. visions
enter my small dark haven

Marie e. Schwartz

How It Feels To Be an Other Mystery

I've been the cheater, the cheated, the body in an underpriced beige raincoat, rubbing my forefinger quickly against the thumbprint of a person I would call my sole, soul confuser.

To run from a bar on Soul Night because his girlfriend's ex stood by the door, already drunk, with a pint of Murphy's, smelling his fresh fabric-sheeted jeans, sensing my short skirt, ready to reveal our two bodies beneath floating trench coats of not knowing what New York would be like for him in a week, and what I would do in his absence. His fists were tied up in steel. Mine were drenched in the shaking of my nerves.

To hide on a Baltimore City stoop, someone's office building, someone's success. His tongue making me drunk with stupidity, leaving my brain cells to fight over my sense. My mind convulsing, wanting to see itself in a mirror, fogged with deception and the steam of ill intention, with the collar down. I wondered what my boyfriend was possibly doing in Virginia, the look of his out-of-control hair among mountains and moonlight. Gilbert's head was shaved and I rubbed it. I decided to slide deeper under shadow.

Lorrie Moore has been racking my brain consistently. For once, I've read a part of my life, written in too familiar handwriting. I hated to look at Gilbert's black and white picture of Nicole, lying on his back seat, examining my eyes for that glare of print that said "I have him now." She shot me each time we made room on his velour seats for our bodies. He hated Luke's picture on my key chain. It fell off into a puddle by the side car soon after.

"How to be an Other Woman." How to be an Other Mystery. Reminding me how much emptiness there is in not being the only one.

Not the only one to kiss him.

Not the only one to feel him.

Not the only one with his fingerprints on your cheek, swirling around your lips, down you neck, around your ears, like a Russian prison tattoo, illuminating your sole sin.

Inked over your image.

Stamping over your sole soul.

In snapshots, in pieces, like postcards turned at the corners, being picked over, moved, seen too many times not to have a permanent image on your pupil.

Overanalyze.

In snapshots, Lorrie Moore captures the pain of finding yourself in failure, trying to cope by fingering any indication of aprogression towards success. Grabbing his skin, thinking it is the real thing, and sinking in.

You've been waiting a while to find yourself.

Now you're just digressing below yourself.

Beyond what you thought you were.

Metaphors and similes, and those snapshots. Dear Lorrie Moore. You must have been there. He must have grabbed hold long

A mistress will burn them, hide when no one would recognize anyway, stand in puddles on street corners, burning a cigarette for each moment that he made you stray away from yourself. Just to hibernate, and awake full of strength.

Tearing off the Phi Beta Kappa chain, ripping the beige raincoat away from unfamiliarity.

Ready to enter into Soul Night, unscathed.

Ann Sosnowski

Shannon Smith

Annabelle's Manifesto

Yesterday, it rained bullets.

My father ushers me into his
Front Line of conversation
on nights like this,
to recall his draft on Christmas Eve.

He doesn't believe women
Are fit for combat.

If my father had been killed
When the jeep turned over,

If my mother's miscarriage
Became nothing but a whisper,

If I had tried harder
To annihilate myself accidentally
On the Baltimore-Washington
Parkway,

I wouldn't be under fire.

Ann Sosnowski

No Particular Weekend

Eyeballed-poked out-bugging
Slant stand-leaning-ankle crossed
Napkin/ drink/ drip
Paint chip shag

Hot cheek-wall balance
Silk red dragon dream
Opium drips-simmer ecstasy oven
Revolving door head hole

Grip white knuckle-banister
South slide-snail release
Heartbeat eyelid spasm
Beige carpet lipstick smear

Leather jacket blanket

Vent vomit heat
Circulate circuitry circus
Pale dent head-wake up
Potato chip slipcover

Vent sausage dust
Ashtray nightmare cheeseburger
Orange juice aspirin revolt
Hobo rust porch chair

Leather jacket blanket

Shiver dizzy-acid gut
Pasty stale dirt mouth
Napkin/ drink/ drip
Low-balled-socked in-lugging

Amy Hall

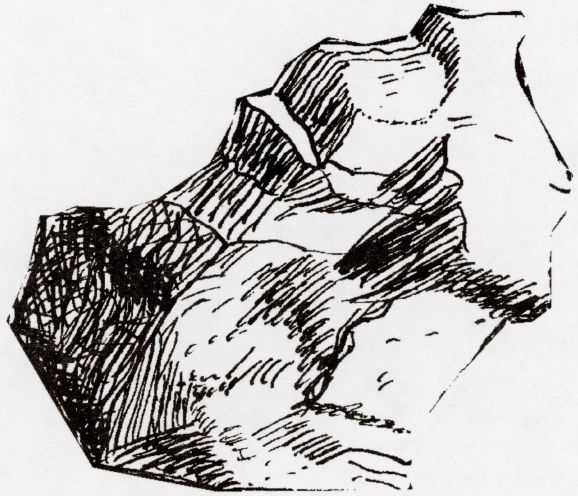
Night Shift

The silence of the night is intolerable.
My down pillow now hard
stone as the woven wool cover
presses heavy against my skin.
My bed like cold, flat, slate reflects
the pale light of the moon in long
shadows that stretch, twist and turn.
The cold, rough floorboards ache,
creaking and moaning, beneath
my pacing bare feet.

An infant face. An unknown name.
Her soft blue lips open to receive
my breath while the small chest
is forced to rise and fall
with the palm of my hand.
My white shoes splattered
with blood, as I pierce
her translucent flesh. My arms stretch,
reach with open hand
to hers, but she has fallen too
far into the deep debt of nature.
I can't pull her back. She is gone.

Finally, before morning light
slides through the stitched
seams of my drapes, I am
released. My dream is left
in the folds of night air.
But her sharp cry remains
when I rise before dawn
to start a new shift, and lace
my shoes again.

Robyn Holley



Claire Mullineaux

what will I do

what will I do tomorrow when I've waited
minutes on top of days
and you come fierce as wind into my face,
obscure as I am, and as afraid?

Olivia Bitting

the Only Argument

sweet-kneed wasn't made for you
the barely woman girl alive
longer than I, and much less learned (perhaps).
those joints remind you of themselves
and do not lend themselves to skirting
which you take so far as to avoid all that reveals them.
you do not seem to be aware
of the affection of the morning sun
gleaming off of the hair that's mine
but paler longer and only yours;
nor do you recognize that your eyes
that see everything and your mouth
that leaves such rich and lovely taunting
("we tease because we love")
and your hands which do your bidding,
which reflect life and more—living,
all belong to me, same as your hair (paler longer).
and each day do prove equality and worth.
music calls you to me, and you stand fast.
you (silent) call me to you; I go home to sing.
we could converse at length in lyrics only,
using their confusion and sources' mouths
to say all things without responsibility
or direct response. you interest me—
sweet-faced, telling of things I never saw
and never may as we carry one another
without destination. I have two things
for you: I am the one to better her beginnings
and my place between the chase
and weak avoidance
is smaller than I am, by far.

Olivia Bitting

Aspirations

I want to be a painter–
and paint beauty into the lives of
unexpecting children.
I want to be a dancer –
and glide through amazed eyes
with the grace of a free bird.
I want to be a singer–
and harmonize with all of the spectacular
voices of friends
that greet me with easy expressions.
I want to be a writer–
and find depth in words such as
"yesterday" and "tomorrow."
I want to be a speaker–
and raise my voice over a crowd
of vulnerable people.
I want to be a photographer–
and capture moments of glory
in one single second.
I want to be a diver–
and swim with dolphins
through never-ending oceans
on days that the sun causes the water temperature
to actually rise.
But most of all, I want to be a lover–
and invite passion into my life,
and touch someone in the cold hours of twilight,
when my heart is most vulnerable
to the sounds of love and life.

Jaime Long

In Rain

Yesterday in a chance walk,
tremulous raindrops
made small spots
across my path.

I would have been happy
to catch them—
under my open umbrella
I watched them gently fall to earth—
those perfectly shaped
splashes
along the clear path.

Jamie Rowland

1903 - 1988

She sat there on the brown, broken couch,
On the same corner cushion, worn from years of contemplation.
She remained there on that spot from the day she entered our home
Until the summer she abruptly left.

I never knew her life's story or what thoughts she passed the day away with
On that ugly cushion. Grave
Tales of her youth were tightly wrapped in the folds of her eighty years
And she never revealed them to me.

I watched as she grew older,
Her wearied legs meticulously covered with a multi-colored afghan
That I think she must have knitted when her eyes were young.

Sometimes she would permit me to sit beside her.
I wiled hours away talking about the red masterpiece I had carefully finger painted or
The life-sized wood castle I had constructed.
And on special occasions I would read Golden Books to her,
My young tongue stumbling over the words.
Sometimes I would sneak my head into her frail lap in the hope
That I might understand her better.

Still, I believe she preferred the old black cat as company,
Perhaps because the cat was not as inquisitive as my five years insisted I be.
The black skeleton would curl up next to her, not uttering a word.
There seemed to be an understanding between them.

I remember she grew sick that winter—Christmas morning.
She was moved with great struggle from her couch to a metal-railed hospital bed
In a small, sanitized, white-walled room, deep within our home.

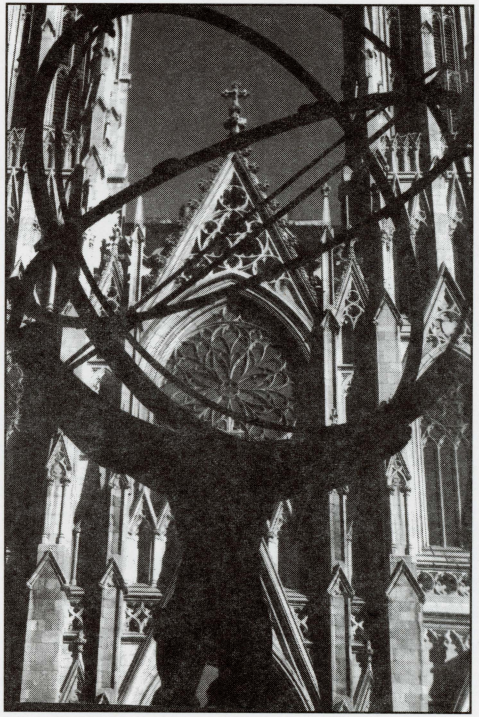
The doctor said it was *Cancer*.

I would visit her often.
She did not seem to mind much then,
She passed the days away sandwiched between me and the old cat
That never left her side.

She never recovered.
She passed away that summer in her sleep.

But I never forgot her,
Her old, tattered afghan became one of my most prized possessions
For years after her death I would wrap myself firmly in its walls
Hoping that I might find her somewhere inside.

Kat Thorn



Vinny Lee

From a Scientific American Found in a Flooded Basement

I salvaged a blood worm with three sets of teeth and no skeleton.
The rest of its soft anatomy had been theorized into existence from distorted fossil stains.
An ancient aquatic sloth with the leg bones of an otter
and the face of a manatee paddled across the opposing page.

Over the text, someone had scrolled I. N. R. I.
Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,
as if the article itself were a sin.

I thought of my father studying cellular biology,
watching nucleui split spontaneously,
while trying to decipher the flagellum's microscopic sign language.

I thought of him standing in a Kansas plain, teaching his children to watch lightning
stitch heaven to the horizon and to look for the covenant at storm's end.

He hides his face in the medicine chest next to his razor.
It is part of his secret morning ritual.

Discussing creationism, devine intervention, I become bored.
It is the science which interests me and the mechanics required
to move to anunattached jaw bone. What chased the sloth from the ocean to the trees?
I desire the details even the stones have forgotten.

Theresa White

Learning Baseball

My father taught me
the infield fly rule
the spring I turned eight,
making me recite it
exactly,
always ending
with the runners advancing
at their own risk.

We watched a lot of games
together, that summer,
he in his madras shirtsleeves,
me in a gingham sunsuit,
but I never once
got a chance to make the call:
there was no advancing,
no risk for any runners.

By the next June he was dead,
victim of too many summer suns
burning their mark
on his shoulders,
branding the back
that would have carried me
high up into the bleachers
on a Sunday afternoon.

And even now
I am still waiting,
watching for the odd moment
when I can make the call
and advance, like runners following
a pop fly,
unafraid of the risk,
not looking at what was left behind.

Chip Rouse

Poet

Alien, out of the masculine lines,
Cross-legged at the sight
Of eve from the bedroom window,
Cowering, fearing the desire to be pulled
Away from the mother's nest,
To be alone in her arms, behind the gates of security.
Sickly boy, bony, porcelain choir lips, never obscured in her night's fire,
Crippled in the false gods' armor, never among Zeus's circle;
Iron-deficient, unable to carry Arthur's sword;
Goliath, unsympathetic when David could not find a stone.
The queen of hearts dismissingly laughed
When he bowed before her.

Eric Thanner

What is Love?

Whenever I hear somebody say they love animals it makes me cringe. It wasn't always that way, though. In fact, I used to respond with great enthusiasm when someone told me they loved animals. I would immediately begin a conversation about their pets and my pets and the cute things they had done. I felt an immediate kinship with people that claimed to love animals. After all, how could a person that loved animals be bad? And whenever I was searching for a topic with someone I had just met, animals seemed like such a benign and simple subject. Now I hate to talk about animals, and if I hear someone say they love animals, I try not to make eye contact so that I don't invite a conversation. It's not that my feelings about animals have changed. I still share my life and home with dogs and cats and birds that I love. I just don't trust the word "love" anymore.

One morning, early in February, when I was working in a veterinary hospital in Birmingham, Alabama, an older gentleman came to the front desk. Both of his hands were bandaged in what appeared to be the remnants of an old undershirt, and I could see where blood had soaked through the makeshift bandages. He had that grandfatherly look: kind blue eyes, crinkled at the corners from years of winks and smiles, and soft white hair that wisped out from underneath his John Deere cap. His clothing was unremarkable. He was wearing the denim overalls typical of the older men in this area. It seems that after retirement, they just can't bear to wear anything but denim overalls and red plaid flannel.

I asked him what I could help him with and he replied that he had his dog out in the car and that he had seen the veterinarian at church and she told him to bring the dog in first thing in the morning.

"What's wrong with your dog?" I inquired as I handed him the standard form all new clients have to fill in.

"Well, he's pretty bad off, I guess," he replied nonchalantly.

"Has he been eating, acting normally, vomiting?" I asked, trying to get some information to record in my appointment book. "Is he current on vaccines?"

"Well," he relied slowly, "He ain't never been to a vet before. He's lost all his hair—got the mange, I reckon." He paused for a moment while he adjusted the bandage on the hand he was trying to write with. "He's lost weight."

"Does the dog have access to any toxins? Has he ever been dewormed?" I asked. I was now getting irritated. I dislike people who don't bother with preventative care for their pets. They irritate me, and strike me as being not very bright. Most of the diseases and problems that we see in veterinary medicine could easily be prevented with minimal expense and inconvenience; however, many people go through life in full ignorance of this fact.

"Well, we keep him chained in the yard," he mused. "He ain't never got off that chain, 'cept today, I guess. No, couldn't have gotten into anything that I know of."

I'm sure I rolled my eyes. Dogs are very social animals and they depend heavily on some type of companionship in order to be happy. I was not looking forward to dealing with a dog that had been tied to a tree its entire life.

He handed me the chart that he had painstakingly filled out. As I reached for the chart, my attention was again drawn to the blood soaked bandages. "Are you all right, sir? What happened to your hands?"

"Dog bit me. Pretty bad bites too. Deep." I groaned inwardly as I pictured a vicious marauding canine, teeth bared, waiting for his chance to bite the vet assistant.

I avoided eye contact, afraid that my distaste for his dog and situation would show in my eyes. "You should get to your doctor to

see about those bites. Dog bites can easily become infected, and you said he has never been vaccinated for rabies," I replied mechanically.

Drawing both on the information the old man had given me and my experience with much of our clientele, I already knew that this was probably not a well-socialized dog; so, with the history of aggressiveness, I made a decision that I still regret. I asked the man to keep the dog outside until the doctor could see them. Perhaps if I had gone out to look at the dog, or if I had taken a chance and let the man bring the dog in, I might at least have spared him another hour of suffering.

When it finally came time for Rusty and his owner to see the vet, his owner shared with me that the dog was unable to walk. Surprised, as this was a symptom that most of our clients would have mentioned, I began to realize that this case was going to be one of the worst I had ever seen.

Because we were short-staffed that day, I helped to carry the dog into the clinic. He was a large dog, about the size of a respectable Labrador but with a longer nose and shorter ears. The other big difference between him and a respectable lab was that he had almost no hair on his body. There were small tan tufts here and there, but nothing that could be called a coat by any stretch of the imagination. He was also thin. Very, very thin. So thin, in fact, that I could see every one of his ribs. He was covered in sores and scabs and tufts, and his eyes were very red, as though something had gotten into them. And he was oily looking. And he didn't look vicious at all. He looked tired and sick and broken, but not one bit vicious.

The next thing that I noticed, or maybe it was the first thing, was the smell. There was a smell so strong and overpowering that my eyes started to water, and I felt like I had to sneeze but couldn't. It was a strange mix of odors that I might have identified separately, but in that combination, it defied words. I asked what was all over the dog and I nearly fell over when I got a response.

"Turpentine," the man replied nonchalantly, "and burnt motor oil."

I was speechless for a moment. When I recovered I asked incredulously, "Why?" I entirely failed to pad my question with even a modicum of politeness. I was simply too stunned.

"That's how we've always treated mange," he replied quizzically, as if he couldn't understand why I would ask such a ridiculous question.

I decided just to carry the dog in and avoid any further conversation, as I was becoming more and more upset. I could now identify every part of the smell: turpentine, used motor oil, and staph infection. Often when dogs have chronic skin problems, including mange, that are left untreated, they will develop a staph infection, and that has a very distinctive, musty smell. By the time I managed to carry the dog inside, I was myself covered in turpentine and used motor oil, and I was nearly in tears. I had cuts on my arms from an earlier battle with an uncooperative feline patient, and those cuts were screaming from the turpentine that was now saturating them. Although I wanted nothing more than to leave the room and forget this man and this dog, I stayed in the exam room with the doctor and the owner and I began to hear the rest of Rusty's story.

Apparently the man's son had come to his home on Saturday and seen the condition that the dog was in. They attempted to treat him with the turpentine and oil. Of course, pouring turpentine and used motor oil onto raw, open sores hurt (as I was intimately learning, my cuts were still burning!), so when the man began poking at the scabs with sticks to knock them off, the dog bit both of his hands. When they went to church on Sunday, they ran into the veterinarian who asked about his hands. When the old man told her about the dog, she told them to just bring the dog in. I was livid when I saw the condition the dog was in. Now I was angry with myself for

being silent and for not knowing what to do.

Rusty was now lying on his stomach on the cold steel exam table. He didn't even lift his head when the people in the room moved around. The doctor spoke to the old man and explained that the skin condition was advanced and that it would not respond to the treatment of turpentine and motor oil he had tried. She said that this type of mange was caused by an immune disorder and that there appeared to be other significant health issues tha would need to be dealt with. She added that treating the dog would be expensive and that there were no guarantees with regard to the outcome of the treatment. Generally, this type of mange, commonly called demodex, is very treatable if treatment begins when the symptoms, usually hair loss around the eyes, first appear. This dog had probably been losing hair for nearly a year. I had never seen a case so advanced except in the textbooks that I studied in my spare time.

Then she told the man that she thought the best thing was to put the dog to sleep. I knew she would recommend euthanasia to this man, but for some reason, the words made me feel as though I had fallen into icy water and couldn't breathe for the cold and the pain. I looked up at the man then. I had been staring at the dog for a long time, but now I looked the old man straight in the eyes.

That was when he said it. He said to me, with a straight face and with all the sincerity of a monk chanting the Kyrie, "I hate to do that, I love dogs." I tried to smile. I probably only grimaced, as I was beginning to feel even more sick to my stomach. I almost couldn't move, but I knew I had to get out of that room. The smell of the turpentine, motor oil, and skin infection, combined with the normal smells of the hospital plus the odor of cigars and horses emanating from the old man suddenly became more than I could stand. And so I left the room for a few moments, to compose myself and to try to decide what to do. I couldn't afford to bring home another dog. I didn't know if this dog would get better anyway, even with expensive treatment.

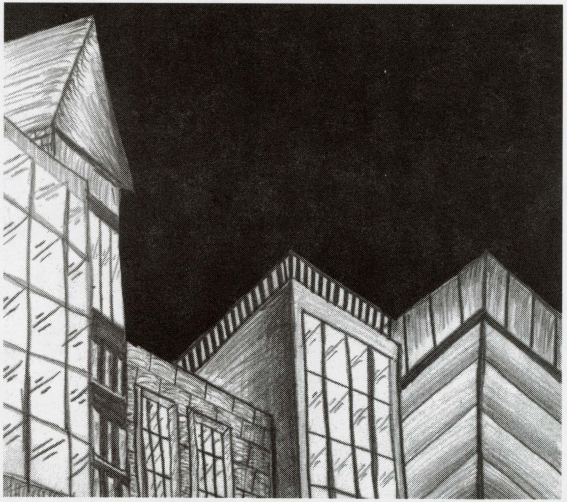
I leaned against the wall outside of the exam room and I started to cry. I cried because of the kind of life Rusty had experienced in his less than two years on this earth. I cried because I could not help him. I cried because there are so many dogs like Rusty. And I cried because the old man believed what he said to me. He believed that he loved animals, and he even believed that everything that he had done to Rusty was consistent with that belief. I cried because I wished that I had known what was going on when he arrived so that I could have saved poor Rusty another hour of living in that kind of pain and discomfort. I cried because I knew what I would have to do next.

I composed myself and went into the doctor's office where we kept the safe. I carefully dialed the combination and removed the long steel box from the bottom shelf, took out my key, and opened it. I took out the amber bottle with the purple label that said "Euthasol," and I set it on the floor. I then closed the box, put it back in the safe, and locked the safe again. With the bottle in my pocket, I walked down the hall to get a syringe. As I passed the door of the exam room, the old man opened it and stepped into the hallway. He was thanking the doctor and asking her if she knew of any pups for sale. She said that she didn't know of any, and then he asked how much he owed her. She said there would be no charge. He tipped his hat to me, said thank you, and walked out.

As I walked back into the exam room, I was stunned. "He isn't even staying with the dog?" I couldn't believe that he would leave his dog alone on that cold steel, gleaming under the fluorescent lights and now covered with turpentine, motor oil, flakes of dead skin, and spots of blood. I drew up the requisite amount. (One cc per ten pounds—that dosage never leaves you.) I had to hold the dog for this procedure, yet part of me was afraid because I knew that he was scared and in pain. I edged closer to him and finally got one arm around his neck from underneath, like a halfhearted hug, while the other arm leaned over his painfully emaciated ribcage so that I could distend the cephalic vein for the doctor. It seemed like hours that I stood there, holding the dog, but it was probably only a few seconds before she told me to release pressure on the vein so she could deliver his death sentence. He died there in my arms. It was probably the only time he had ever been held or treated gently in his life, and he was only conscious for about forty-five seconds of it.

he loved animals replayed themselves again and again and again. I could not get his face out of my mind as he smiled at me over his prostrate dog and said words I had always been relieved to hear in the past. I thought a lot about what love means to me and what love means to other people. I thought about the tremendous burden that loving, really loving something or someone other than myself places on me and everyone else who makes that choice. Maybe we all have different ideas of what love is. To me, love is commitment and sacrifice along with joy and reward. It means learning the best way to do things and then doing them that way, even if that way is not the easiest or the most convenient. To that old man and many others like him, it just meant saying the words.

Heather Lord



Jason Kn3aeur

Needle Way to be

Across and round the silly bends
the Needle Nyddles doze again.
Nodding heads about to lend
a nod to bid adieu again.
Across and round the silly bends
Nyddle won the Wilber when.
Won the one, the winter men.
Judged a win a one a when.
Needle Nyddle Noddle Noo
Nyddle ran one to two.
Came a far because to do
To run the one, to run to do.
Nyddle Noddle Nyddle Nay
Ring-A Rung-A sang today.
Singer songer sang to say.
See the song and stand away.

Needle Nugle Nuctle Say
Read a rhyme and run away.
Read the round and rounded play
and played around a rock to say
real the rule and rock the way,
and run the while another day.

Needle Nyddle Nay!
Needle Nyddle Day
Needle Nyddle Run away
Needle Nye No school today.
Needle Nyddle Run away
Needle Nyddle School today
Needle Nyddle Come to be
Needle Nyddle Rescue me
Needle Nyddle Come today
Needle Nyddle Come today

Needle Nyddle Come to stay
Needle Nyddle Come and stay
Needle Nyddle Come and stay
Needle Nyddle Come and play
Needle Nyddle Will you be
Needle Nyddle There for me?
Needle Nyddle Will you stay
Needle Nyddle Every day?
Needle Nyddle Will you find
Needle Nyddle Half the time?
Needle Nyddle Half the day
Needle Nyddle Come and play
Needle Nyddle Rescue me
Needle Nyddle Come to be
Needle Nyddle Cup of tea
Needle Nyddle Come to me
Needle Nyddle Entity
Come to be, entity.
Rescue me, come to tea.
Cup of stay, come to stay.
Play away. Stay a day.
Come to me. Entity.
Come to be cup of tea.
Come to stay. Come my way.
Come to me. Rescue me.
Come my way. Come to stay.
For to see
Come KeyKey. Calmer ray,
Come a day. Try to win
Tumble pay.
Delay. Away
to be.

Joel Griffith

Vegas

In a fake city
on a treeless land
one wants to get drunk
for beer's organic taste alone.
Drinking under fake palm trees
you expect to see those girls
from the Bud commercial
jump out at you
in pink bathing suits.
You'll see them later though
in some show, kicking their legs.

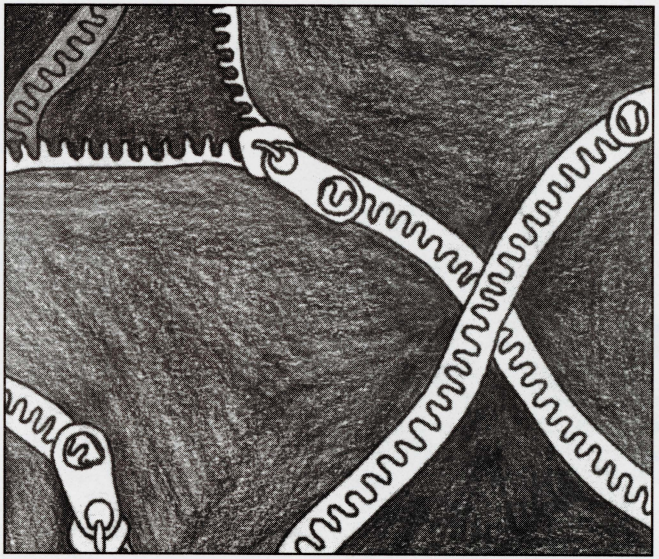
Looking at fountains
you can smell the dank, bacterial smell
of the unclean water. Those plaster caster
dolphins spit it out, and suck it up again
into some hard orifice
under the muddied water.
Stray stars, the coins, send a trembling,
weak light to the surface of
my watery eyes.

Sitting in some ritzy restaurant
you see the beautiful girl,
more modern than beautiful.
Long, black hair
thin, strong, tan and
dusted with lustering
cosmetics. A black dress
ready and equipped, her body
looks like a sleek, black pistol.
The man beside her
looks like the fat bullet.

Sitting in another lounge,
people trying to
be the power people I saw before.
They fail miserably.
I smell tired people
I feel the wasted energy.

People stare at me
because I'm not trying,
"She doesn't believe in the magic of Vegas!"
I'm wearing overalls.
Everybody else got dressed up for Vegas.

Tara Meyer



Shannon Smith

Excerpt from Fighting Gravity

Z's hands had helped to build the frame and his body had been in this bed and his picture had been torn off the ceiling long ago but some sickly residue remained and she wanted to slide off the bed onto the floor lightly as Louise would do (had she ever been there) and walk long-strided to some bar he'd never been to or even heard of, smoking cigarettes, going someplace where she could be sure her imagination wouldn't convince her she could smell him. She could scarcely bear it to be in that bed, her only bed, the bed she made herself and allowed him to help her make, only there were pictures. The pictures on the ceiling, her friends, many of whom she hadn't seen in months or maybe years if she could even remember the last time, if she'd been paying attention the last time as if she had any idea that one day she'd be alone in her bed, looking at them, wondering how she ever stopped calling and how they ever gave up.

One of them, Tara, warned her he would consume her and she said she wouldn't watch it. She didn't, she hadn't, she'd been gone longest. She'd been right. Some of them wouldn't mark the month at all, would just continue to toil in their jobs as they had the month before and would the month after; some would be finally starting full-time degree driven jobs, celebrating or lamenting that they would not be returning to classes in the fall. The last of them, the youngest *(I saw her last on August 12, I met her five months and thirteen days before that)*, would be entering her final year of college, would be excited at the proximity of finish and at the subjects of the classes she took that were built around books, would be working far beyond full time in order to pay her rent and buy her books and reward her finished homework and A pluses with a few beers.

Even now she'd have bags under her eyes. She's look at her fingers wrapped around a pen as she took notes and see that her nails and the skin around them would not after any amount of scrubbing really be clean. Maybe she'd obsess about work the way she tended to, about what was going wrong and how she could fix it, imagine the sight of her area peaceful before shift, chaotic during, and again peaceful after.

Maybe she'd be ignoring the professor for other reasons. Maybe she'd met a girl she liked and was drawing her name. Maybe she was writing poetry. *If it only had my name on it if I could just close my eyes and see her there and look over her shoulder and see that she was writing for me then I could just tell her I felt the same and it would be all right everything would be fine and we'd be together and I wouldn't be alone staring at my ceiling my skin crawling, my mind racing knowing I have it all to say sure she won't even listen*

Her picture had been added somewhat late in the game of taping snapshots to the ceiling and was an 8 x 10 besides. Its place was against the corner of the ceiling and wall on the edge of the collage. It pulled her eyes ever to one side to see a small skinny girl standing in a puddle wearing baggy jeans and a sports bra, her hands in her pockets and her mouth pulled into a grin. *Remember that day, when we watched the rain from your living room and played the Smiths until you couldn't stand it anymore? You said it was all too depressing, the music and the rain, and you were sick of looking at me looking sad, so we cranked up the stereo and you put in the Indigo Girls, opened a window and we went outside to run through puddles. I took my camera out of the car because you were standing right in the middle of that puddle with your hands out, palms up, your bare feet nowhere to be seen and you had your face turned up to the sky, eyes closed and the most peaceful grin on your face. You put that picture on the wall in your bedroom and I have it hidden away now because it's too beautiful to bear but this one, this one when you smiled for me, I can stand it to see you smiling at me*

Voyz rolled off of her bed and landed with one foot on a book she'd left lying on the floor, not catching herself but crashing into the floor and stretching out with her eyes closed and her fingers in her dark blond hair. She'd hated it, stick straight, for years. It wouldn't hold a curl given any amount of chemical help, just hung straight and thick and she always just pulled it into a ponytail and forgot it. *Once*

Louise said something about how she doesn't go for blonds except for me and I didn't know what to say so I just laughed because it was meant to be a joke and I didn't want her to know how it made me feel. Only now I wish I'd told her. There was laundry to do and there were dishes to wash and the phone was ringing and she was lying on the floor looking at her hands.

She listened to Z leave another pleading message while she lit a cigarette and sat in the chair by the open window. She reached over the ashtray to tap above the street and imagined the gray ashes floating down onto the sidewalk. She didn't lean over to watch them.

The metal jewelry box everyone hated sat silent and small on her dresser, seeming proud of its strength and sure that it could protect its contents. One corner was flattened where Z had launched it at the window and been lucky (or unlucky) enough that it struck the frame and not the glass, had only fallen to the floor with a clatter and the lock he'd been so angry at held fast against him. There was a nick in the drywall across the room, a testament to his rage and a reminder of the fight that he ended by kicking the stubborn box away from the window and into the wall before he stalked out and down the stair as loudly as he could.

Voyz dropped the butt out the window and took a small key out of her silver cigarette case. She crossed the room and opened the box as she did everyday and looked down at the sole object lying against the blue velvet interior. She touched the folded piece of paper and locked it away again. She didn't have to take it out or open it up; it just had to be there. She had it memorized.

She saw Louise at work every day and still they didn't speak. It was noticed and never spoken of except by meaningful, pitiful glances to one or the other of them by someone who didn't feel it but knew that it was wrong, by anyone who'd ever seen them sitting outside after work talking, who knew that sometimes Voyz had waited up to an hour, smoking cigarettes, for Louise to walk out of the bay door and squint in the sunlight while she fumbled in her pockets for a Camel Light that Voyz was always ready with her lighter in her hand. Voyz was sure the poet smoked with Michael now or with one of the other supervisors or even in a group as they often did, a group Voyz had been a part of as long as Louise was there and she wanted to be a part of it. Now they never spoke and only sometimes caught each other looking, their eyes locking and Louise's jaw muscles bunching and her nostrils opening just so much and her gaze steady and sorrowful, but her chin was up, her head was high and she always broke it and turned back to her work. *And what does my face look like then, when we catch each other looking tortured at one another and the shock of contact blows fire under my skin and she is so beautiful and so far above me?*

She'd burned some letters, maybe three or four, that she had thought out and written down and rewritten and carried to work in her back pocket and carried out in her back pocket and then stood staring in the windows of a car she knew was not locked with the pages in her hand, imagining the poet sitting there with a cigarette in her mouth and her door half open, scribbling furiously on her lap or steering wheel in a notebook or on some scrap of a receipt she found on the passenger-side floor, needing it so bad she couldn't wait to write it down, imagined her for once the audience and not the speaker, reading, and not writing. *I wanted to read every word to know what it was like to be her but I couldn't ask and she never showed me except that once.* And standing over that small car thinking *I have veen sitting so close to where I am now when I was so much closer when I was so far from where I am now and I know where she is and where she'll be and that seat there has been mine has held me next to her for periods and I wasted them thinking what about Z and I wasted them thinking what about men and what about women not even thinking just going or not going and I am standing here staring at where she was wishing she'd be there one more time afraid she'll come early and see me wishing she'd say some cryptic poet thing to give me the answer like if she read this she'd know more like if I could read all she ever wrote I could know it all I've never even kissed a girl how can I know it and I could know if it was right all I know now is I want it she walked away from me I want it* I miss her then looking at the pages that suddenly said nothing and walking to her own car, driving

home, stopping along the way to light the pages on fire on the side of the road, not crying, not sad so much as heavy and not sorrowful so much as sorry and already wishing she'd just left the damned thing on the driver's seat of the little black Civic.

It was Sunday and her only day off; two jobs to eat and pay the rent took time though maybe less than one job and fifteen credits. Louise did homework on Sundays *I know what you are doing right now you are poring over a book through maybe not for school maybe for fun for pleasure or maybe it's the one you're writing that I'll find on a shelf and read someday and love you more for or maybe just love for your sake because it's yours even though I can't understand it all the signs and symbols and complications but it will be beautiful and I can see that at least* she used to think she'd be there, too, peeking over the small shoulder and refilling glasses of Kool-Aid or milk and helping to cook dinner.

At seven she counted the hours until she had to be at work and calculated how much she could sleep before her alarm went off and knew she would not sleep any more than she had, no more soundly, not with her face looking down from the ceiling and the memory of Z still in the bed and her stomach empty because even if she could work up the nerve to cook a meal or order a pizza she wouldn't be able to eat more than a few bites and so she just didn't bother any more except for some toast and cookie to nibble on and a beer to curse for not making anything better.

I want to write you the way you wrote me and say it all well and make sense of it or atleast make it obvious or something or anything just anything but this wondering what you think and how we feel and missing you doing nothing I want to sit now and write a letter that I will still mean tomorrow so I can leave it for you and then it can be up to you but I can't even hold this pen I want to write the way I feel when our eyes lock flashing through the dim building all of the fear the pain the love the need the wonder the absolute wonder of you and of me and of how we live now the fact we still live the wonder of your eyes that seem to wonder too I havn't even seen them close to mine in so long like it was years like I'm lying on the floor again because I can't move without you not without him but without you not so much without you as with all of this left this way and the not knowing the not knowing if you would turn me away or hear me out the not knowing if I catch you looking at me because you love me or hate me I can't think you hate you love you do you have to Louise oh Louise you don't even know that I left him don't know I sat still and smoked a ciggarette and left and never went back? And do you know why? You don't know why you don't even know you should know you should know.

Olivia Bitting

"Trust Me"

"Come in,
Come in, be still where you lie.
Shiver and quake, pray you don't die.

"Come in,
Come in, we are all friends.
Nothing and no one is worth a buck ten.

"Come in,
Come in, please come and see.
Your life is but a worthless lie, please trust me.

"Come in,
Come in my friend.
Nothing is real, the world's at its end.

"Come in,
Come in. Sit. Please. Drink.
Don't feel. Forget your past. Don't think.

"Come in,
Come in, young and old.
Reality is all the lies you've been told.

"Come in,
Come in. Exhale and rest.
Exhale a last, choking breath.

"Come in,
Come in. Here's what is mine.
I took it from others, I'll take yours in time.

"Come in,
Come in, new truth you will learn.
You rancid, vamping, noisy worm!

"Come in,
Come in, you're more precious than Gold!
I'll end your life to purchase a Soul."

Joel Griffith

loquacious

sweet cities below breathing
swinging by three souls
sobbing thwapping
exhausted doddering
moody flushed
like a time clock stuck
blasted heroes
zen saints
tumble
falling
drunken
there carven shared face
suffering always
fingers in mouths
sucking all the oily residue
of sardines perserved in tannic
mustard palapble by god
devoid by humans
this evanscent effeminate phamtasmagoria
blisters bleeds howls
where have all the women blown?

Marie e. Schwartz

44 Words and 1 Number

This is a stupid poem.
It kills brain cells,
It truly sucks.
It's not worth the ink and paper it's on.
It was a waste to write
And it will not change the world or the weather.
It's simply 44 words in an inconsequential order.

Joel Griffith

I Am Here

I am round, I have corners
I make sounds in close quarters
I am hard, I am easy
I close my eyes and stretch to reach me

The soul in my chest says my mind needs a rest
Don't leave me quite yet
I am singing

I am smooth, I am lumpy
I am one, and I am many
I am large, I am helpless
Yet I move and I am able

The soul in my chest says my mind needs a rest
Don't feed me quite yet
I am breathing

I am flesh, I am water
I am sealed, yet I am punctured
I am joy, I am pain
I am sunshine and I am rain

The soul in my chest says my mind needs a rest
Don't free me quite yet
I am busy

I am old like the fall corn
I am dead, I am reborn
I am now, I am yesterday
I am here and I am gone away

I am here.

Tom Hopkins

Amanda Pruett

Nocturnal Geometry

I.
Anger cradled her sleep like a bee charmer's bees,
his body close and soft
and dangerous. Each morning she unfolded
slowly, and waited for his voice
to peel off her clothes, her skin.

Each day recorded its own violent details:
the canter of footsteps, in the doorway
his shadow, the unforgiving corner
of their bedroom, his fingers
wound with hair, threats coming
hard and fast, the weight
of his hand, a rainstorm,
her sundress
torn.

Child, during the blossoming of his rage,
your laughter scatters sunlight
across the carpet.
Would you, in your moments of anguish, forgive me
for my inability to hold the wind,
for deserting you now,
for loving him still?

He found her
house key on the bookshelf with his spare
change.

II.
He wove such beautiful stories of belief and need,
she mistook lust for passion
and gave birth clutching his hand.

Hoarding the fierce shards of their marriage,
they stand—lovers forbidden.
Here, even holding the distance of strangers,
she notices the tenderness of his jaw line.
In whichever memory he is lost, he is waiting for a kiss.
She recalls, suddenly, handfuls of coarse dark curls.

He whispers *If I reached for you now,*
would there be anger still heavy
in your bones, or could you rest awhile here in my arms?
I remember how to touch your sensitive skin.

Separate, they are not lonely, but here
walking the edge of intimacy,
they draw an uneasy line between parent and lover.
Glass falling reminds me of you making love,
making only soft sounds. But I cannot
stop the shattering.

Mornings, she stretches before the mirror,
drawing out her angles into arcs beneath silk.
There is no one to witness her body, softer in its sleep.

Theresa White

Winter Love

I want to lay you down
on the pure blanket of snow
outside my window,
and watch you make angels
with your caring arms—
the ones that will hold me someday,
and shelter me from spontaneous weather
and icicle touches.

I want to watch you make snowballs
with your hard, thick hands,
while I fix you hot chocolate
to warm them after the fight,
and children dance
in your snow artwork.

I want to watch you
shovel frustration away,
so that we are able to go
about our everyday happenings
with only a little bit of dampness
covering the tips of our shoes.

I want to watch your nose
turn shades of scarlet,
and your eyes gel over
after yesterday's worries have passed,
and all you care about
is the fire I am tending,
and the flicking of my tongue,
as hot chocolate creeps down my throat,
and I whisper, "I love you."

I want to watch you remove your gloves
and caress my blushing cheeks.
I want winter to last forever
with you,
so long as you can make
the coldness turn to summer warmth
when you kiss me.

Jaime Long

2.17.00

The sweltering humidity in the air,
bugs dead clad on the back of sweaty skin,
Oozing red blood and the noisome imminent rank being
Of sweating sleeping on a rooftop of a car
In the jungles of Mexico.
Dirt poor dirt shoes dirt floors.
Holy souls rejuvenated in the not-so-american night
The incessant search for IT,
The finality of the esoteric hallucination
Of Mexican nights
The end-all the be-all
The beatific visualization bred from deprivation
Of sleep, food, whatever normal sustenance may be.
In the air sweltering humidity dead bugs clad on
The back of Sal's odorous skin.

Marie e. Schwartz

June 2000

This morning, trimming forsythia,
I made poems.
The lines, like long green plumes
Swept by the breeze, bending, turning waving,
Taunted me to leave my task
To find a pencil,
Dared me to remember.

Some branches snip easily,
The new growth wilts with cutting.
Others, tough and woody,
Resist the pruner's bite.
They bend, twist, hang on,
Until with one handle against my heart
I pull the other,
Two-handed, home
And feel the slow topple of the living spire.
Some need the saw;
Others, long dead and rotting,
Break off clean at ground.

I remember the forsythia of childhood,
The rooms Kathy and I designed
Under arching branches.
Our third-grade teacher
Put "forsythia" and "fertilizer"
On our spring spelling list.
Two f-words that broke
Our alphabetical tour.
Why not "wisteria" and "watering can"?

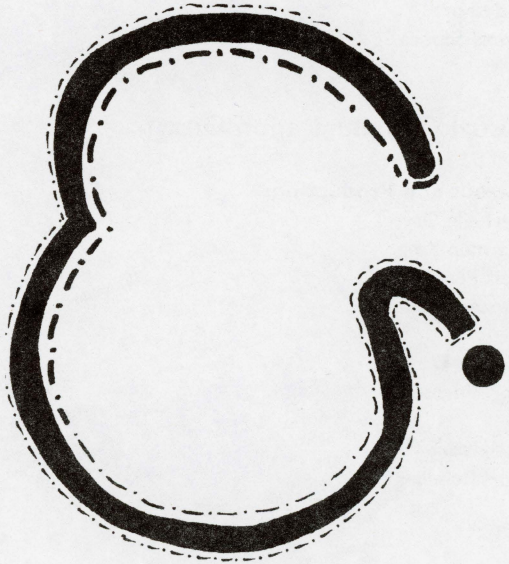
I recall past springs,
The first in this house,
When the driveway turned into a gauntlet of gold.
We, almost too busy,

Stopped in awe.
We did not yet know
The need of pruning
And so it flourished, untamed,
Until new plants grew, layered from tips of old.
We cut them free,
Dug and replanted.
What glory to see our transplants thrive.

Now, years later,
I nearly curse that planting,
So thick and tangled
I can't reach the primary stalks.
I cut and pull,
Bend and break and toss the long spears clear,
No longer taking pleasure in the task.
Where once I nipped each chosen branch,
Now I chop and tear, ripping out old growth.
Cut ends bear witness to the fray,
But new green will hide the wounds.
"Just let it grow," some say,
But I know the price of that temptation.
The chore becomes too great to tackle.
Better fight the battle year by year.

Tonight in bed,
The lines still wave in my head,
Some green and fresh,
Many tough and thick,
Unyielding.
I prune forsythia every year.
I know, if forsythia does not,
That cutting back
Prepares spring's golden wands.

Carol Sapora



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